

NEW ENGLAND NOTE

A NEW BARNSTABLE COUNTY, MA, RECORD FOR  
*ASCLEPIAS PURPURASCENS*

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While inspecting the status of a small population of *Rhododendron canadense* (L.) Torr. present in a moist woodland habitat on the edge of a shallow wetland depression in Falmouth, Massachusetts, we discovered three individuals of *Asclepias purpurascens* L. (Asclepiadaceae) in the understory ground cover. The species is found from New Hampshire to Virginia, west to Iowa, Kansas, and Oklahoma, and north to Wisconsin (Gleason and Cronquist 1991). Purple milkweed is identified as belonging to a "Division 2; Regionally Rare Taxa" category in "*Flora Conservanda: New England*" by Brumback and Mehrhoff et al. (1996) with fewer than 20 current occurrences in New England. Purple milkweed is a State Threatened taxon in Massachusetts with two extant occurrences. In New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, purple milkweed is listed as a State Historic taxon with no extant populations. The taxon is not reported from Maine or Vermont. Previous records for *A. purpurascens* on Cape Cod and the Islands are rare with only a few occurrences documented during the past decade (P. Somers, Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, pers. comm.). A single specimen was collected in 1986 from a dry heathland community on the Miacomet Plains on Nantucket (Sorrie and Dunwiddle 1996). Two early records of *A. purpurascens* from dry oak forest habitat in West Tisbury and Chilmark are referenced in *The Flora of Martha's Vineyard* published by the Martha's Vineyard Sandplain Restoration Project (1998). Despite repeated surveys performed in conjunction with the New England Plant Conservation Program (NEPCoP) sponsored by the New England Wild Flower Society in Framingham, Massachusetts, the authors have been unable to relocate a Barnstable County population discovered by

Richard LeBlond in 1989 under a transmission line corridor in Brewster, Massachusetts. This species is not mentioned in "Notes on the rare flora of Massachusetts" (Sorrie 1987).

The Barnstable County plants were first observed on July 8, 1998. A single terminal umbel comprised of 24 flowers atop a pubescent peduncle was observed on the taller (50 cm height) specimen. The smaller specimens did not produce inflorescences. Distinguishing features included the bright magenta hoods (7 mm), which turned darker purple-red with age. The erect hoods clearly surpassed the gynostegium and the short, incurved horns. The opposite, elliptical leaves (15 cm) had distinct petioles, transverse veins and an acuminate leaf tip. The stem was slightly hairy while the undersurface of the leaf was covered with short, downy hairs. The upper surface of the leaf was glabrous.

Associated species in the ground cover included *Pyrola rotundifolia* L. var. *americana* (Sweet) Fern., *Gaultheria procumbens* L., *Vaccinium angustifolium* Aiton, and *Lycopodium obscurum* L. under an open canopy of *Pinus rigida* Miller, *Quercus alba* L., and *Q. velutina* Lam. A locally rare fern, *Osmunda claytoniana* L., occurred on the upland slope of the wetland depression intermixed with *O. cinnamomea* L.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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